

TO: CT Department of Environmental Protection

FROM: Elaine O'Keefe, Director of Health

RE: **Public Hearing on the Diesel Emissions Reduction Strategy**

DATE: August 10, 2005

I regret that I could not attend the hearing this evening. Please accept this written statement in support of the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) diesel emissions reduction programs, policies and legislation, on behalf of the Stratford Health Department and the Healthy Stratford Council. The Healthy Stratford Council is a collaborative of local agencies, concerned residents, and the public school system, that work together to advance disease prevention and health promotion interventions and policies in Stratford and our region. The Health Department and the Council believe that a timely, aggressive and comprehensive approach to reducing diesel emissions throughout Connecticut, is vital to improving ambient air quality and reducing respiratory disease. Furthermore, we believe that the long-term economic impact can be substantial.

Here in Stratford, we are well aware of the public health impact of poor air quality. Childhood hospitalization rates for asthma in our region are higher than the state average, and the Bridgeport area receives frequent non-attainment scores for ozone levels and other indicators of pollution.

The Stratford Health Department and officials from the Stratford Board of Education met in the past year to discuss retrofitting the engines of school buses with diesel particulate filters, and other options, albeit we have not been able to secure adequate funding to bring this goal to fruition. We have also worked to enforce the CT DEP bus idling policy at the local level with some success. Moreover, the Healthy Stratford Council has spoken out about air quality issues in public forums and has advocated for a school bus conversion program in our town. We are determined to make this a reality in the future, though we recognize it is but one component of the multi-faceted approach that is needed to effectively address the problem of diesel emissions in our region and in CT.

In summary, we believe that the State should act swiftly to provide incentives for retrofitting all diesel-burning vehicles and equipment, and to support the purchase of new vehicles and equipment that operate with alternative fuel as the existing diesel-burning units are replaced.